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## SUCCESS STORY

### New Web Site Brings Diverse Community Together



Guests at the launch of the Tyre Cultural Forum's Web site and film club had an opportunity to discuss social issues after a screening of "Zozo."

***"Our dream is one country  
united, not separate areas  
ruled by different politicians."***

***—Dr. Abdel Nasser Farran  
President  
Tyre Cultural Forum***

Program Manager:  
Jennifer Boggs Serfass  
E-mail: [jboggs@usaid.gov](mailto:jboggs@usaid.gov)  
Tel: (202) 712-1004  
Web: [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov) (keyword: OTI)

U.S. Agency for International Development  
[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

**November 2008** – A diverse group of youths from the city of Tyre in southern Lebanon have come together to develop an online platform that rivals the city's two most popular social Web sites, which are run by the region's dominant political parties. In contrast to the partisan sites, the new Web portal offers the public a nonaligned space for dialogue and publicizes nonpartisan activities and events.

With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the Tyre Cultural Forum (Mountada Sour Al-Thakafi) sought to change the existing paradigm, training 19 youths in Web site design and construction and providing support as the trainees developed the site, [www.mountadasour.com](http://www.mountadasour.com). The youths took photos, conducted research, and wrote articles to create an independent space for dialogue as well as a place to promote tourism, economic development, and cultural and artistic events. The grantee was able to leverage prior support by building on training provided by other donors and employing IT equipment that was not being used.

Trainee Raed Kassem said, "We are motivated to open the minds of others so we can help improve our community together as a team, regardless of religious or political affiliation." Kassem is now planning to further his education in computer science.

The participants have also started a film club to stimulate discussions on social issues, including conflict and human rights. The members have selected 20 films to show, the first of which was "Zozo," a Lebanese film about a child's experience during the civil war. The screening, which coincided with the Web site launch, attracted around 120 viewers from different confessional backgrounds who engaged in discussions both before and after the film.

While the youths will focus their efforts on updating the site and promoting the film club for now, in the future they will be supporting other educational and cultural events in the area. According to trainee Shireen Basma, "The project has given us a purpose. We're now advertising in high schools and universities to find students we can collaborate with in sharing their opinions and talents."